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THE WORKLOAD OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER.
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENG.,CHAMPAIGN,ILL
ILLINOIS ASSN. OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH, URBANA

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THE NCTE COMMITTEE ON WORKLOAD OF THE ELEMENTARY TEACHER BELIEVES THAT EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION IN ENGLISH DEPENDS UPON THE EFFORTS OF THE ELEMENTARY TEACHER, BUT THAT THESE EFFORTS ARE OFTEN VITIATED BY CONDITIONS BEYOND THE TEACHER'S IMMEDIATE CONTROL. PRIMARY AMONG THESE CONDITIONS ARE CLASS SIZE, AVAILABILITY OF PLANNING TIME, NONINSTRUCTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES, ACCESS TO INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS, AND OPPORTUNITY FOR CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL GROWTH. THEREFORE, IN THE INTEREST OF BETTER TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH RECOMMENDS A RATIO OF 25 PUPILS PER TEACHER, PROVISIONS FOR DAILY PLANNING TIME, CLERKS TO AID TEACHERS, A LIBRARY AND AN INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS CENTER, AND THE CONSIDERATION OF INSERVICE TRAINING AS PART OF THE TEACHER'S WORKLOAD. (THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE "ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN," FEBRUARY 1968.) (DL)

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The Workload of the Elementary School Teacher

By the Committee on Workload of the Elementary Teacher of The National Council of Teachers of English: adopted by the Board of Directors, November 23, 1967, in Honolulu

The following statement of conditions necessary for effective teaching in the elementary school was prepared by a Committee of the National Council of Teachers of English and was adopted by the Board of Directors of the Council. Howard Blake, chairman of the committee, presented the statement.

UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

Effective instruction in English in our schools depends upon the efforts of the elementary school teacher, but these efforts are often vitiated by conditions beyond the teacher's immediate control. In spite of the many differences among elementary schools across the nation, certain assumptions seem to hold for all of them.

1. All elementary teachers are teachers of the English language arts, even though elementary teachers typically teach more than one subject.
2. The preparation of pupils for the secondary school is not the sole function of the elementary school, but a major responsibility of the teaching staff is to coordinate their instruction with that of the secondary school.

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3. English includes the development of language skills (including reading), the study of literature, and the exploration of the nature of language.
4. Teachers in elementary schools must themselves be proficient in the uses of English.
5. Successful teaching of English is relevant to the lives of pupils and is related to the number in a class.
6. Teachers who are properly prepared and who are given adequate time for the tasks directly related to teaching will make responsible judgments about the use of that time.
7. Teachers must continually acquire new knowledge and improve their teaching.

These assumptions underlie the following recommendations and statement of policy.

THE TEACHING LOAD AND THE TASK OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

The responsibilities of the elementary school teacher are broad and diverse, demanding sensitivity and teaching skills in a wide variety of subject areas. Nonetheless, over half of teaching time in the elementary school is directly related to one or another aspect of English; every teacher must attend to the reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking of his pupils and must help them explore and appreciate language and literature. In all subjects, the chief task of the teacher remains to help each child explore his own experiences, become skillful in his communication, effective in his expression, productive and logical in his thinking, and adept in his relations with others.

If the responsibilities are numerous, they are also frustrating. The task of most elementary school teachers is complicated by the unreasonable workload they carry. Major elements of this workload include class size, planning time, the use of teacher time, access to instructional materials, and opportunity for professional growth. Issues implicit in these elements of load are examined in the following paragraphs and lead to recommendations for action in every elementary school in the nation.

Class Size

The relationship between a child's control of language and his success in most school activities is indisputable. So is the importance of early instruction in language use. Large classes, however, reduce the teacher's ability to pay enough attention to each child's

pattern of language development. Indeed, teachers can effectively diagnose children's needs, provide a suitable variety of books, materials, and assignments, and evaluate children's progress only if class size is limited to not more than 25 pupils; furthermore, the younger the children, the smaller the class should be. Groups of children outside the normal range of learning capacity or emotional stability also need classes of smaller size.

Although many schools are not organized around the self-contained classroom, the ratio of 25 children for each teacher should be preserved as a maximum in all teaching situations. Except within a team-teaching organization, no teacher should be responsible for more than 25 pupils at any one time. Even for teams, the ratio of children to teachers should not exceed 25 children for each teacher on the team. Moreover, no teacher at the elementary level should teach more than 75 pupils a day; otherwise he will not be able to properly adapt his instruction to the individual child.

Availability of Planning Time

The elementary school teacher has a large and inescapable responsibility for planning. The varied kinds of planning have different purposes and require special conditions; they must be executed in a variety of ways. Some of this planning necessarily occurs during off-duty hours because a teacher seldom puts his pupils out of his mind and because the teacher must plan and evaluate his own effectiveness as a teacher. Much planning must occur at school both during classes and before and after them.

A teacher must continually study. He must acquire knowledge of new subject matter, assess teaching methods, and examine new teaching materials. This kind of planning, which must occur largely outside the usual school hours, is the professional responsibility of each teacher and is not to be considered as part of the workload as stated in this document.

Examination and evaluation of the school program and planning for change are joint responsibilities of all the teachers and administrators in a school. They must work at these activities cooperatively, at the school. Sometimes they can confer on school days; more often, development of curriculum, selection of textbooks and analytical review of materials can be accomplished only on weekends or during school holidays. Administrators should make provisions for this type of planning since it does affect the workload of the teacher.

Daily preparation for teaching demands intellectual energy, imagination, thoroughness, and flexibility. Somehow the teacher

has to muster these qualities when he is outside his classroom if he is to perform well inside it. He can do some of this planning away from the school, but experience shows that much of it must be done at the school. When an elementary school teacher has continuous responsibility for a group of children from the opening to the closing of the school day, his time for planning is insufficient.

As an absolute minimum, an elementary school teacher should have, during the course of each school day, one class period or 30 minutes of planning time free from any teaching, supervisory, or monitoring responsibilities. This should be time during the school day when children and teachers are in school. Such procedures as consecutive scheduling of specialized teachers can be used to release a block of planning time for the classroom teacher.

Use and Misuse of Teacher Time

Time for preparation should not be consumed by miscellaneous clerical duties. Certainly instructional time with the children needs to be zealously protected. When elementary school teachers spend a disproportionate amount of time on such duties as collecting money, keeping records, and monitoring, both teacher morale and the quality of instruction fall. A minimum of one clerk for every six classroom teachers should be provided to avoid such misuse of valuable time.

Unnecessary interruptions by a public address system or unannounced visitors can also result in a serious cumulative loss of teaching time. Administrators should try to confine announcements to a few regularly scheduled periods and to reduce the number of unplanned interruptions.

Access to Instructional Materials

It is a waste of valuable professional time and competence to force teachers to plan without adequate material resources. To fulfill his many teaching responsibilities, the elementary school teacher must have ready access to many kinds of resources, ranging from books to natural objects to specialized equipment. There is a clear need in each elementary school for a library and an instructional materials center with a properly trained staff to select, catalogue, and maintain these materials.

Professional Growth

An assessment of an elementary school teacher's workload cannot exclude the educational background and competence that

the teacher brings to his job and continues to develop. Particularly in English, pre-service preparation programs for an elementary school teacher have been weak, even though it is the English language which is the pervasive element in all of his instruction. To teach English well in the elementary school, the teacher must have read widely in poetry, drama, and prose fiction and have learned to use his knowledge of language and rhetoric to analyze perceptively both adult and children's literature and to relate this analysis to instruction in basic reading skills. He should not only be able to react sensitively to literature but also be able to write clearly. His teaching of composition should reflect awareness of the complexity of the composing process and of criteria for evaluating prose. He should understand the essential principles and techniques of modern language study and should be aware of the historical background of American English.

However excellent his preservice preparation, the elementary school teacher must continue improving his background for teaching. To ensure this growth, administrators should provide help from supervisors and colleagues, facilitate teachers' preparing carefully planned but flexible curricula and study guides, and conduct pertinent, well-directed in-service sessions. Released time or, when school is not in session, extra pay for the teachers involved is essential to these activities. No amount of alteration in the physical conditions of teaching can exceed in importance the teacher's increased understanding of the individual child and his continued imaginative and intellectual search for ways of helping each child develop his fullest potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the interest of better teaching of English in the elementary schools throughout the nation, the National Council of Teachers of English recommends the following:

1. Self-contained elementary school classes should be limited to 25 pupils. In patterns of organization other than the self-contained class, children may be grouped in larger or smaller units at different times; teachers of English in such arrangements, however, should not teach more than 75 pupils per day, nor should the class size exceed the ratio of 25 pupils per teacher.
2. A minimum of one class period, or at least 30 minutes, should be provided each elementary teacher each day as planning time.

3. At least one clerk for every six teachers should be available to attend to the many non-teaching chores inevitable in an institution as complex as a school.
4. A library and [an] instructional materials center with proper staff and adequate and varied teaching materials should be provided in every elementary school.
5. Participation in programs initiated by administrators designed to increase competence in teaching the English language arts should be considered a part of the teacher's workload and should often involve released time from other duties.

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